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LANDSCAPE

By Jan Monchablon

MILWAUKEE ART EXHIBITION

The twentieth annual art exhibition, recently held at Milwaukee, in connection with the Industrial Exposition, was scarcely equal to several of its predecessors. There was no lack of notable canvases by masters of world-wide fame, many of the best painters of Europe being represented by especially good examples of their work. But the general average of excellence was distinctly lower than in some of the former exhibitions. One missed particularly striking canvases by the younger generation of artists, the pictures of these latter-day men being, for the most part, decidedly inferior. Examples of unusually fine coloring and remarkable composition were also inconspicuous.

On the other hand, it should be said, to the credit of the management, that the collection lacked the earmarks of the average sale exhibition. Commercialism, without good judgment and conscientious purpose, has been one of the leading characteristics of such displays. American exhibitors have lent themselves readily as the agents of European artists of mediocre attainments, with the result

that sale exhibitions of European art products in this country have frequently been little more than traps for the unwary.

In this regard Milwaukee has been singularly fortunate. The management of its exhibitions has been actuated by a desire to present to the public works of unquestioned merit, and the commercial element, therefore, while ever present, has never been especially obtrusive. Indeed, through the wise policy followed, the public has been afforded a treat in the way of choice collections of pictures which it could not have enjoyed had it not been that the expected sale in this country of the works shown warranted the expense of importation.

This year the most notable canvases exhibited were by men of high reputation who are popular among the American picture-buying public, and whose works are commonly known as good sellers. Among these were four canvases by Bouguereau, one of which is a recent and important work. They are all canvases typical of this painter's style and class of subjects, smooth of surface, delicate of color, and finely modeled. Beside many of the acknowledged masters of painting Bouguereau seems thin and washed-out; his faces and figures, his Cupids, Venuses, and Madonnas, moreover, are all limned after the peculiar type accepted, if not pre-empted, by him. He lacks robustness and realism. But his figures all bear the stamp of refinement, his nudities are chaste, and lack of force and conviction is perhaps compensated for by grace and delicacy.

"Love's Whispers," brought from this year's Paris Salon and exhibited at Milwaukee, is one of the best of Bouguereau's recent canvases. It is thoroughly characteristic, is subdued and harmonious in color, and is notable for the delicate flesh-tones observable in all of this artist's work. "The Two Sisters" and "The Elder Sister" are works not inferior in conception and quality, though the "Cupid" is less interesting. It is to be doubted if four finer canvases by Bouguereau were ever shown in a single exhibition in this country.

In fineness of drawing and perfection of technique, Bouguereau has few equals, but this very excellence is little less than a defect, since one would welcome some defect to mar the conventional ideal beauty his art produces. This, however, one may never expect. In the face of the reaction against classicism he has remained, and will ever remain, a classicist. But as has been truthfully said, his technical knowledge is so profound, his skill so masterly, and his art so powerful in its intellectual vitality, that he has been able to hold his own against the strongest rush of the naturalistic tide that would sweep feebler men before it. His adherence to his artistic beliefs is intense and his will is indomitable.

Two important canvases shown were by the Parisian, Vibert, "The King of Rome" and "Contempt for the Throne." The former work is especially strong and characteristic of the artist. It is one of the

few canvases displayed that is almost daring in color and markedly dramatic in composition. It is, moreover, especially noteworthy for its facial expression and for the skill with which textile fabrics are depicted.

The painting represents an episode in the life of Napoleon I. The emperor is seated on his throne with the baby king of Rome upon his knee, while the pope, with his retinue of cardinals and bishops, does him forced homage. There is a fine touch of satire in the faces and figures of the ecclesiastics who are obliged thus to bemean themselves. The incident depicted, occurring as the culmination of Napoleon's policy to subdue the church to his will, offered unusual opportunity for forceful treatment, and probably no other painter than Vibert could have told so well in color this story of humiliation.

The second of the Vibert canvases is in a sense the complement of the first. It represents an episode on the day following the incident portrayed in "The King of Rome." A cardinal and a bishop chance before the unoccupied throne of the hated monarch, and express their contempt for the absent ruler by defiant looks and postures. The execution of both pictures is faultless. With an intimate knowledge of human nature Vibert combines a surprising acquaintance with historical detail, and his pictures, therefore, radiant with light and brilliant with color, are as faithful to historic verity as it is possible to make them. In this regard he has been likened aptly to Meissonier, who in his costume pieces studied to make them absolute transcripts of the times from which his incidents were taken.

The pictures just described are painted after the artist's own heart. It was his good-humored satires on the hypocrisy and self-indulgence of monkish and ecclesiastical life that did much to advance him in popularity. A man of many parts, he became a satirist of drastic power, and an author of no little excellence, and at the age of sixty he works with all the enthusiasm of student years and indulges with a relish in the pictorial satire that first attracted attention to him. What is more, years have developed in him greater ability as a colorist and have stimulated rather than deadened his love of daring experiment.

A fine specimen of the work of Schreyer, who died about a year ago in Frankfurt, is another picture displayed that merits a word of comment. This canvas, "Bedouins in Camp, Algeria," is a marked departure from the artist's usual style of treating such subjects. Most of Schreyer's Arab pictures present a dazzling arrangement of color, but this work is notable for its sobriety and its richness of tone. Again, there is in it a suggestion of repose that is almost foreign to Schreyer, who, in his Arab pictures, is prone to represent the horsemen as picturesquely costumed and excited, and the horses themselves as the very embodiment of energy. In "Bedouins in Camp, Algeria," the artist has successfully carried out a subdued color scheme by making the pale horizon and the white horse upon which the Arab is

mounted balance in equal contrast the tawny complexion of the horsemen and the deep yellow earth.

Cazin was represented by his "Wheat Field," one of the last canvases painted by him before his death. The painter was an intense



DEER IN THE FOREST

By Rosa Bonheur

naturalist, but he was also a man with deep poetic insight. His work, therefore, is not a mere matter of externalism. He invests his canvases with a wealth of thought, and makes them eminently pleasing by his skillful handling of colors, especially his delicate grays, light yellows, and blues. In point of beautiful effect the picture under notice is no exception to his usual work.

Israels, the so-called Millet of the Netherlands, was represented by a strong picture, "Evening Bells," which is somewhat suggestive of the "Angelus." It is Israels' special forte to depict the pleasures and pains of the poor, which he does with a sympathetic heart, and



THE CAVALIER
By Ferdinand Roybet

therefore with a tender brush. He has done for the peasantry of the Netherlands what Millet did for that of France. His spirit, however, is more hopeful and less tragic than that of the French painter.

In "Evening Bells," as in his other works, there is a noble seriousness, a wholesome human sentiment, and a positive poetic charm.

His coloring is rich and subdued, but not somber. It was works of this class that first won him honors, and he does well to adhere closely to his specialty, since his earlier efforts at historic composition have been forgotten. The special interest of "Evening Bells" is its kindly humanism, that makes its direct appeal to the beholder's heart.

Another canvas coming direct from the last Paris Salon is Mlle. Fould's "Blind Man's Buff," a fine composition, replete with youth, beauty, and jollity. The four life-size figures are finely poised, and the faces are refined and brimful of mirth. The work was one of the special attractions at the Paris Salon, and from its brightness and piquancy was one of the most admired at Milwaukee. The talented young artist is free from affectation and mannerism. The motive of this picture is worked out in a simple, straightforward manner, and the execution is as happy as the conception.

A canvas by Jacque, painted in 1882, when the artist was at the height of his powers, was another of the attractions of the exhibition. It is called "Shepherdess and Her Flock," and depicts the fair rustic in the fields near Fountainebleau. The landscape is well composed, and is made luminous with the atmospheric effect of which Jacque was a master. The figure accessories are equally well painted.

The artist's early training rendered him a firm and precise draftsman, and his handling of color was notably broad and decisive. He aimed, moreover, to be careful and accurate in detail, and to avoid over-elaboration. The picture displayed at Milwaukee, which belongs approximately to the same period as his painting recently acquired by the Layton Art Gallery, is an especially fine specimen of his work, showing all his characteristics, and further, displaying much more spirit than many of his famous canvases.

Another picture of country life, but of a different type, is Jules Breton's "Peasants Raking Hay," in which the central figure is a woman standing gracefully against one of the rosy skies which Breton studied so enthusiastically and painted so admirably. No living painter in France has done so much to excite popular interest in peasant life as Breton, and the management of the exhibition congratulates itself on securing this picture for exhibition after eight years of effort. It displays all the distinguishing characteristics of the painter's genius.

Perhaps the most striking, and certainly one of the most admired, pictures on exhibition was Alexander Harrison's "The Golden Coast." This is one of the artist's best tonal efforts. It is a symphony in red, subdued despite the intensity of its color, and replete with all the witchery that Harrison knows so well how to incorporate in his canvases. In the hands of a less skillful artist the picture would have been little more than a lurid mass of color, but with Harrison's masterly treatment it is a picture of wonderful power despite the fact that it is essentially unnatural in tone.

The coast sweeps across the canvas in a graceful curve, its sand is red, the hills banking it are red, the waters washing it are red, the sky over-arching it is red. No mortal ever saw a landscape like it, and yet the tonal effect has its charm, and the picture is fascinating. It is even more striking in its tonal effects than the several Harrison canvases of similar character exhibited in America last year.

A select roll-call will suffice for the rest of the exhibition. Felix Ziem, Rosa Bonheur, Meissonier, Ridgeway Knight, Clays, Fritz Thaulow, F. Roybet, Henner, Cæsar Detti, Carl Marr, Jan Monchablon, Gabriel Max, Harry Rosland, Smith-Hald, Karl Raupp, George Haquette, A. Bierstadt, Childe Hassam, E. I. Couse, Svend Svensen, and other artists equally well known to the art-loving public, were represented by canvases characteristic of their specialties and types of work.

Pictures were thus gathered together from the Old World and the New, from the brushes of artists living and dead, and are representative of almost every school of art. And if, as was said at the outset, the average of excellence was perceptibly lower than in some former years, the collection was certainly varied enough and good enough to make the exhibition one of exceptional interest. Milwaukee could scarcely command an international exhibition of paintings, and it is to be congratulated on the fact that it can annually have the benefit of a collection of choice works gathered from such diverse sources, for the purpose of sale, but exhibited in the same way and with the same object in view as the more pretentious collections gathered and displayed under the auspices of public institutions.

HENRY T. TAIT.

